



State of the City: November 1, 2019
Mayor Nancy McFarlane

Prepared Remarks

Thank you all for being here tonight, I usually give the state of the city in the spring, however this year, I was a little under the weather and unable to be here.

I want to acknowledge the current City Council members that are in attendance, as well as those who I have had the pleasure of working with over the past 12 years.

Council member:

- Corey Branch,
- Nicole Stewart,
- Dickie Thompson,
- Russ Stephenson,
- Kay Crowder,
- Stef Mendell, and
- David Cox.

As well as:

- Charles Meeker,
- Mary-Ann Baldwin,
- Bonner Gaylord,
- Wayne Maiorano,
- John Odom,
- Randy Stagner,
- Philip Isley,
- James West,
- Thomas Crowder,
- Rodger Koopman, and
- Eugene Weeks.

It has been an honor to serve our city alongside of you.

I realize that in a traditional State of the City speech, we all come to expect certain things.

It would not be a state of the city if I didn't tell you that our economy is strong and growing. Our unemployment rate continues to decrease and we are now at about 3.7 percent.

Just last year we announced 81 new and expanding job announcements, across multiple sectors, representing more than 4,900 jobs and \$198 million in investment.

Raleigh is booming with opportunity.

In many ways, Raleigh is the envy of the country.

So what does Raleigh have that other cities don't?

We are fortunate to not only have three Tier 1 research universities right here in the triangle, but NC State, Wake County Community College and our other colleges and universities right here in Raleigh produce the kind of talent that employers are looking for. Our town/gown relationship with NC State could not be better, and we are both benefiting from that relationship.

We are half-way between the mountains and the beach.

We have a great climate – for now.

We are the state capital, which brings not only commerce, but how fortunate are we to be home to the NC Symphony, the NC Theatre, the Carolina Ballet, the NC Opera, the NC Museum of Art and other great institutions of art.

We have the winner of the James Beard Award for Outstanding Chef in the country, Ashley Christensen, right here in Raleigh.

We have one of the best parks systems in the country.

We are safe, beautiful, successful, exciting, bursting with potential.

Everything you would want in a significant other!

But the real key to our success, is our people.

We believe in this city, we love this city and we invest in this city.

It's no accident that we maintain a AAA bond rating, which allows us to borrow money at the lowest possible rates. We are financially stable and secure.

We invest in our public utilities. Making sure that you have a safe and reliable source of drinking water is a priority for us. One of those "non-sexy" things we did was put a backup generator on all of our pumps. If we have another event like a hurricane and the power goes

out, you will still have water. In fact, our utilities enterprise system also has a AAA bond rating. In fact, in 2016 we received our third AAA bond rating for our enterprise system, which allowed us to refinance our bonds, saving us \$12 million.

We invest in our public safety services, opening new fire stations and police stations. This year we broke ground for a new, state of the art training center. This will not only prepare our officers for the extraordinary work that they do each day to keep us safe, but it will help in the recruitment and training of new officers.

We invest in transportation. Not only maintaining the roads that we have, but investing in expanding our transportation options, whether that is by car, bus, bike, or yes, even scooter. We plan for Raleigh, Wake County, the Triangle and how we move around the state, the east coast, the country and internationally.

Our airport is a huge factor in our success. I have had enough conversations with CEO's of companies looking to headquarter here to know that strong connections across the country and around the globe are important to our economic success.

We are moving forward with the Wake County Transit Plan. Transit not only helps us alleviate congestion, but it is a key piece of affordability. We have talked a lot about housing affordability, but if you can get where you need to go without the expense of a car, or a second car for a family, that is a huge part of the expense of living in the city.

Speaking of Affordable Housing, Raleigh, like every growing city in America, is facing the issue of affordability. Our 2019 Adopted Budget included \$22 million for housing programs. We added close to 1,000 affordable units across the city last year. We have programs that provide assistance with home ownership, neighborhood revitalization, creation and preservation of rental developments and provide owner occupied loans to help rehabilitate homes to allow owners to stay in their homes.

We work with many partners across the city and I want to take a moment to thank DHIC and about a half a dozen partners for the work that they did with Washington Terrace. Washington Terrace was built in the 50's and was up for sale on the private market. DHIC came to us to ask for assistance to purchase it, rebuild it and make sure that it remained affordable. Not only did they produce an amazing product, but they did it without displacing long-time residents. And, they built an incredible day care facility, which is operated by the Methodist Home for Children. I cannot stress how important the addition of safe, reliable day care is for hard working parents. They are currently finishing up a 60 unit building for seniors. This is a project that respects the neighborhood and provides much needed affordable housing.

We also worked with the county and opened Oak City Cares, a multi-service center for those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This one building centralizes services that in the past were spread out across the county.

We support our small businesses and entrepreneurs. Whether it is through one of our grant programs to encourage job creation, building upfit, or our new Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprise Analyst, our office of Economic Development and Innovation supports entrepreneurs across the city.

We love it when we see a home-grown company like Pendo grow to announce that this year they will add another 590 jobs on the heels of their announcement of \$50 million dollars of venture capital investment.

We invest in Sustainability. In May the city council adopted a community-wide goal of an 80 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Just this week we broke ground on a new Bio-Energy Recovery Facility. We will more efficiently manage waste by-products, and produce more renewable natural gas than is used to produce it, resulting in a reduction of our greenhouse gas emissions and produce enough fuel for up to 50 of our buses, which will be running on compressed natural gas.

We invest in the Arts. The arts define us. They enrich our lives.

In 2010 the economic impact of the arts on the city of Raleigh was \$143 million dollars. Just 5 years later, in 2015, that number had risen to \$531 million dollars.

As I mentioned earlier, not only are we fortunate to be the capital of the state and home to our state arts organizations, but we continue to see the organic growth of our artists, musicians and especially the culinary arts.

Our culinary arts community here is not like any other city. Local restaurateurs work together and rather than see each other as rivals, they believe that working together lifts all of them up and enhances our community.

And boy, does this town love a festival! Our many festivals not only provide a sense of belonging and community pride, they contribute millions of dollars to our economy. We had so much fun working to bring the International World of Bluegrass Festival to Raleigh, and I am just amazed every year how it grows and grows. We have truly embraced the bluegrass community and they love us.

From SparkCon, to BikeFest, The African American Cultural Festival to Artsposure, or Dreamville to First Night, there is truly something for everyone.

And speaking of something for everyone, there is our incredible Parks and Greenways system.

We invest in our parks and community centers because they are an important part of who we are.

Just this year we installed wi-fi at 11 community centers and pools, renovated the Walnut Creek Softball Complex, renovated and reopened Moore Square Park.

Recently, we broke ground on improvements at Chavis Park, which will include a two-story community center with full-size gym and indoor track, a splash area and other amenities. We support so many programs from children to seniors and have expanded our summer youth employment program.

Our parks are the most egalitarian space we have. I once had a woman thank me for our great parks. She was a single mother and did not have the means to take her children on vacation, but she could spend the day at the park with them, and that meant the world to her.

Which, brings me to Dorothea Dix Park.

A park for everyone.

And it took everyone to bring us to this point.

I want to take a minute and recognize Mr. Greg Poole. I met him when I became mayor and he was intent on saving that land for a park. He and the other Dix Visionaries worked tirelessly with the state to bring about an agreement that would enable the city to lease or purchase the property from the state. We had to do it twice, but working with the Dix Visionaries, Dix 306, Friends of Dix Park, Gov. Perdue, Gov. McCrory and the state legislature, (and some behind the scenes help), we finally reached an agreement.

Then we had to start the process of planning.

We had interest from around the world, but I know that we made the right decision in hiring Michael Van Valkenberg's team to work through the Master Planning Process.

Thanks to Kate and Diane and Stephen at the city. We had almost 70,000 pieces of citizen input during the process. It was the most thorough outreach and engagement the city has ever done.

What we have is a Master Plan that will guide us for generations to come. We all want to do it right now, but patience and perseverance will be our friends. And speaking of friends, we have the Dix Park Conservancy, led by Jim Goodmon. These advocates have made it possible for us to do the Master Plan, Plan for "project now" and support us on this journey. We can't do this alone, and I cannot thank you enough for all of the time you have dedicated. This is truly a journey of the heart.

So yes, we invest in Raleigh.

Because when we invest in Raleigh, whether it's sewer pipes or swing sets, we are investing in ourselves.

We are helping us be healthier. We want to provide gathering places for those that are lonely, and places for solitude for those that just need some time alone.

We are making our lives safer, protecting the environment for future generations, keeping the trees that line our streets, making sure that Raleigh always feels like home.

Here's the thing.

We have to do this together.

We all fundamentally want the same thing for our city.

So let's stop dividing ourselves.

It's not neighborhoods versus developers. A developer built your neighborhood. They built your children's school, your place of worship.

I hear they even built a Wegmans.

We have to work together to build the Raleigh that we want.

Someone can always find the "disaster" development and point it out. But don't forget to acknowledge the great things, too. The Dillon, Charter Square, the building we are standing in right now.

Politics has become ugly. Social media makes it easy for people to say horrible things and feel protected behind the keyboard.

The more we are divided, the harder it will be to achieve our dreams.

While I was working to bring the Dalai Lama to Raleigh, I was fortunate to work with a group of faith leaders here in Raleigh. We have continued our conversations around what it means to be a Compassionate City and I have formed the Mayor's Commission for Compassion. We talked about Caring in Action, and created the mission statement "To create a City of Compassion, we turn strangers into neighbors, and foster emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of all life. We accomplish this through mutual respect, and understanding."

This is the Raleigh that I know and love.

Our strength has been and always will be our people.

We care about our community and we care for each other.

And we like to have fun!

I was asked in an interview with Southern Living to describe Raleigh in one sentence. I said we are a glass of sweet tea with a shot of vodka!

I am profoundly grateful to the citizens of Raleigh who honored me with the mayor's job four times and put their confidence in me. I am most appreciative to the city staff, as tireless and

dedicated a group of people as I have ever known. I have been so fortunate to work with great people like Ruffin Hall, Gail Smith, Robin Tatum, Tom McCormick and so many others. I especially want to thank Charles Meeker for his counsel, his wisdom, his patience and his friendship. I learned a great deal from him and I will always be grateful for his guidance and support.

And finally, I'm grateful to my husband, Ron, and my children who have supported me through some wonderful times and some very tough times. I love you all so much. Of course, I have to talk about the people that have inspired me in public service the most, my granddaughters, Maddie and Ella Jean. I think most of us in this kind of job have that someone special that reminds us why we are putting in the long hours of public service.

When the critics are after me, I think about them.

Right after we closed the deal on Dix Park, I picked Maddie up from pre-school. I asked her, "Maddie, do you want to go see the park I got you?". Yes! She said. So we went and drove through the Dix Park Property. "Did you get this for me?" she asked. "Yes, I did", I answered. "Do I have to share it with everybody?", she asked. "Yes, you do. But secretly, I got it for you".

Because when it comes right down to it, all we do, we do for our children and grandchildren. And their children and grandchildren.

It has been my honor and my privilege to serve as your mayor.

Thank you all.

And I can't wait to see what's next.

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